



LOCAL EDUCATION

McKinley County has received millions of dollars and is using it for building and upgrading facilities. It is also being used to hire more teachers. We now have our full complement of teachers. The Gallup McKinley County Schools District is initiating a program to include parents in the educational process.

Historically, we have been ranked at the bottom for educational success. Now, we can watch our school district and expect substantial improvements in developing our most important asset, local human capital. If we invest in ourselves, we can't lose.

COVID UPDATE

In spite of the fact that New Mexico has had an 87 percent increase in deaths in the seven days over Christmas Week, there has been no increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are down 34 percent. Our cases are dropping rapidly. The trend is wonderful.

But the good news may not last as cases are rising all over the country. Misinformation has allowed many people to be hospitalized and to die unnecessarily. So far in the U.S. over 800,000 people have died. Social media has wrongly called into question the effectiveness of

the vaccine while the U.S. Centers for Disease Control report that unvaccinated people are 11 times more likely to die of Covid-19.

Want to end this mess? Get your unvaccinated friend to get a shot. A Los Angeles Harbor official was quoted in the "Wall Street Journal" saying that the shipping delay crisis at the port would be over in seven weeks if everyone was vaccinated.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CITY OF GALLUP

With state and federal funding on its way, our County Commission and City Council can now check their list of needed and unfinished projects.

Some projects on the horizon for the city are water and sewer line replacement, as well as road improvements and a new library. The simplest solution to avoid city disruption would be to add a second or second and third story to the library at its current location and add elevators. One has to wonder about the proposed location for the library across the railroad tracks on the former lumber yard property between Second and Third Streets. The former Lowes Market site or perhaps a location along South Second Street seem like much better options.

And the area around the three condemned motels to the northeast of Miyamura and Main Streets looks like a wonderful brownfields reclamation project. Create something nice, perhaps with the flavor of the old Route 66.

MCKINLEY COUNTY

The County plans always include road improvements and currently two big economic development plans are in the works. One is in the Carbon Coal Road Industrial Development area where the County is working with the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation to develop a four-parcel industrial park with one of those dedicated for the new Rhino Health Glove Factory. Another big project is planning for a new jail. The proposed location has the new jail constructed where the old Juvenile Detention Facility is located on Hasler Valley Road.

Speaking of the former Juvenile Detention facility, it is currently being successfully operated by Santa Fe Recovery which is renting the old jail and has a recovery center there called Four Corners Detox Recovery Center. Top on my list for a joint City/County project is the extension of Hasler Valley Road from Miyamura to Red Rocks Park. A three lane road there would provide much better access to the expanding uses east of the Community Pantry and to the growing White Cliffs area, while at the same time fulfilling a long-term county plan to extend the road. This would take traffic off the dangerous two-lane road portion of Highway 118 running past the Casino.

The County has endless options for road improvements. There are any number of county roads that would benefit from a spending boost.

COUNTY BUSINESS

The COVID shutdown of 2020 is tapering down, but business continues to complain of a shortage of workers. One restaurant is short one-half its normal staff. Another restaurant owner complained that he can't find a cook while offering \$17.00 an hour. This is a national issue.

In the state and nationwide, unemployment is at a comparative low with employers raising wages to entice workers to return to work. The business magazine "Barron's" reported at the end of November that jobless claims fell to their lowest level in 52 years. This was followed by

an "Albuquerque Journal" article on Dec. 10 that U.S. jobless claims have reached their lowest level since 1969.

KGLP

Our local public radio station has applied to the Federal Communications Commission, for licenses to extend repeaters to expand radio coverage into the Ramah and Zuni areas and also into the Window Rock-Ganado corridor. If approved, these repeaters will likely be in service in 2023.

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

The state spread around cash during the pandemic to keep us all afloat. Those funds included up to 15 months of assistance for rent and utilities for renters and \$200 million in grants for small businesses, support for hiring and rehiring as businesses bring employees back and expand operations. Interested? See www.nmfinance.com/leda-recovery-grants.

In November, the federal government was putting the finishing touches on an estimated \$2.5 billion for New Mexico. Intel said it is investing \$3.5 billion to expand New Mexico operations in Rio Rancho.

The state is actively expanding opportunities for entrepreneurs who wish to start or expand their businesses. I attended a one day N.M. Tech Program which was split between telling the attendees what forms of assistance are available in the state and true life "we did it stories" from entrepreneurs explaining what they did and how they did it. If you have an idea, now is probably the best time in decades to push your project.

THE NATION

Like the president or not, since the pandemic started, the S & P 500 is up 26 percent, The U.S economy is booming, helping the entire world to recover. The Wall Street Journal reports that Christmas shopping is up 8.5 percent compared to last year, the fastest growth in 17 years, with many shoppers returning to brick-and-mortar stores.

Of course inflation is up. This is in large part due to the supply crunch due to the unvaccinated extending the pandemic. Strong demand combined with supply chain clogging has resulted in extended inflation. The supply chain problem is expected to dissipate in the first half of next year.

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